

**REMARKS**

In the Office Action, the Examiner has required restriction to one of the following inventions: Species I, Fig. 23;

Species II, Fig. 26;

Species III, Fig. 28;

Species IV, Fig. 29; and

Species V, Fig. 30.

In particular, the Examiner is now requiring an election between these species, indicating that the election seeks to focus the election among the different locking species, while still allowing claims to the various species that lack the locking features. In addition, the Examiner further indicates that the review of the multitude of embodiments necessitates the action at this time. The Examiner has also stated that claims 1, 4-12 and 21-26 are generic.

Applicant provisionally elects to pursue the subject matter of Species IV, corresponding to Fig. 29 and claims 13 and 14 in the present application. Applicant makes this election with traverse for the following reasons.

Applicant respectfully traverses the restriction requirement with respect to Species I, Species II, Species III, Species IV and Species V. The Examiner is thanked for indicating that the subject matter set forth in these various figures is patentably distinguishable from each other. However, a review of pending claims 1 and 4-28 demonstrates that the various karabiners (including the various locking mechanisms), as set forth in the claims, are so closely related that a complete search of one invention must necessarily include a search of the other. Consequently, there can be no significant burden on the Examiner for maintaining these two distinct inventions in a single application.

Application No. 09/922,496  
Paper Dated: September 30, 2004  
In Reply to USPTO Correspondence of July 13, 2004  
Attorney Docket No. 3265-011266

Additionally, the present application has been prosecuted for over three years before this restriction requirement was made. On August 1, 2002, the Examiner issued an Office Action, to which Applicant filed an Amendment placing the claims in allowable form, as indicated by the Examiner. On May 9, 2003, the Examiner issued a further Office Action allowing claims 1, 4-8 and 12-28, and based upon a new search, rejecting only claims 9 and 10. In response, a further Amendment was filed, again placing the claims in allowable form. Various further correspondences and submittals were made due to an inadvertently issued Notice of Abandonment by the United States Patent and Trademark Office. In any case, all of the claims are in allowable form, and the Examiner has already searched these claims twice. Accordingly, the length of prosecution, together with the allowable state of the claims, further bolsters Applicant's contention that there can be no significant burden on the Examiner for maintaining the distinct inventions in a single application.

The Examiner's reconsideration of the restriction requirement between the various Species set forth in the Office Action is respectfully requested. Applicant reserves the right to file, at a later time, a divisional application directed to the non-elected inventions. Further, pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 1.48(b), there is no change in inventorship as a result of this election.

Respectfully resubmitted,

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